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ABSTRACT

This study reports the percentage of whites, blacks, Mexicans, and Puerto Ricans who, as children, adolescents, and teenagers, lived in one or more of several family types (e.g., mother-father, mother-only, mother-stepfather). Unlike previous analyses of the topic, the present one looks at Mexicans and Puerto Ricans separately, treating them as two distinct groups. It finds that whites are least likely to have ever lived in a nonintact family (i.e., a family whose heads are not the biological mother and father of the children), whereas blacks are most likely. The percentages of Mexicans and Puerto Ricans who have ever lived in a nonintact family fall in between and are quite different from each other, proving that the two groups should not be indiscriminately combined under the category of "Hispanic." Five tables are included. An appendix gives definitions from the report. (Contains 24 references.) (Author)

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Roger A. Wojtkiewicz

PARENTAL-STRUCTURE EXPERIENCES OF WHITES, BLACKS, MEXICANS, AND PUERTO RICANS

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Parental-Structure Experiences of Whites, Blacks, Mexicans, and Puerto Ricans

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Abstract

This study reports the percentage of whites, blacks, Mexicans, and Puerto Ricans who, as children, adolescents, and teenagers, lived in one or more of several family types (e.g., mother-father, mother-only, mother-stepfather). Unlike previous analyses of the topic, the present one looks at Mexicans and Puerto Ricans separately, treating them as two distinct groups. It finds that whites are least likely to have ever lived in a nonintact family (i.e., a family whose heads are not the biological mother and father of the children), whereas blacks are most likely. The percentages of Mexicans and Puerto Ricans who have ever lived in a nonintact family fall in between and are quite different from each other, proving that the two groups should not be indiscriminately combined under the category of "Hispanic."

Parental-Structure Experiences of Whites, Blacks, Mexicans, and Puerto Ricans

PREVIOUS DATA AND RESEARCH ON PARENTAL-STRUCTURE EXPERIENCES

Our knowledge about the living arrangements of children has increased as better data have become available. Cross-sectional data provided by the Census and Current Population Survey detail the proportion of children in various living arrangements at different ages. From these data, we know that the proportion of children in female-headed families has increased dramatically in recent decades. However, cross-sectional surveys tell us nothing about the dynamics of children's living arrangements. These data sources describe the living arrangements of children at a point in time but do not provide a history of living arrangements.

Given the limits of cross-sectional data, researchers turned to life-history and longitudinal data to measure experiences of children with family disruption (Bane 1976; Bumpass 1984; Bumpass and Rindfuss 1979; Furstenberg, Nord, Peterson, and Zill 1983; Glick 1979; Hofferth 1985). This research showed that (1) the proportion of children who ever experience family disruption is much larger than the proportion in mother-only or mother-stepfather families at any age, (2) a large proportion of children in recent cohorts have experienced family disruption at some time during childhood and adolescence, and (3) the proportion experiencing family disruption has increased over the last few decades.

Two recently released data sets provide better information on the parental-structure experiences of children than was available in previous data sets. The 1987 National Survey of Families and Households (NSFH) and the 1988 wave of the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLSY) included questions on parental structure from birth to age nineteen. These two data sets allow for examination of the dynamics of children's living arrangements in ways not possible with

earlier data sets. For example, studies using marital-history data cannot say with whom children are living; they can only determine whether the mothers of the children are separated, divorced, or remarried. On the other hand, estimation of children's experiences using NSFH and NLSY data is based on reports from the children themselves. These data allow not only for estimates of the proportion experiencing disruption but also estimates of the proportion experiencing different types of living arrangements, that is, estimates of what kinds of parental situations in which children have lived.

Research with parental-history data has broadened our knowledge of the living arrangements of children. Martinson and Wu (1992) and Wojtkiewicz (1992), using NSFH data, pointed out two key aspects of the parental-structure experiences of children. First, parental-structure type at birth strongly affects subsequent experiences. On average, those born in mother-father families spent most of their childhood in that type of family, while those born in mother-only families spent most of their time in mother-only families and some time in stepparent families.

Second, there is quite a bit of complexity in the kinds of parental structures which children experience. Martinson and Wu (1992) found that while eleven parental-structure sequences cover the experiences of most respondents, large numbers of sequences are necessary to describe the experiences of 10 to 20 percent of respondents. Wojtkiewicz (1992) showed that those in mother-father, mother-only, or mother-stepfather families at age fifteen had lived in a variety of types before then.

Initial results using NLSY data have been reported. Haurin (1992) used NLSY data to describe the living arrangements of whites, blacks, and Hispanics from birth to age eighteen. As did Wojtkiewicz (1992) using NSFH data, Haurin showed how the proportion of children living with their mother and father decreases with age and the proportion living with their mother only or their mother and stepfather increases with age.

A deficiency in previous research is that the experiences of Mexicans and Puerto Ricans were not considered. However, these disadvantaged groups warrant attention since they constitute significant proportions of the population. The primary contribution of the present study is comparative analysis of the experiences of not only non-Hispanic whites and blacks but also of Mexicans and Puerto Ricans.

Knowledge about the living arrangements of children is important because of the implications for their immediate and future welfare. An immediate effect of change from a mother-father to a mother-only family is the drastic drop in family income (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1991a). Research on the long-range effects of such experiences has shown that those who lived in single-parent families attain lower levels of education, marry earlier, become parents earlier, have sexual intercourse earlier, are more likely to have premarital births, and are more likely to divorce (Astone and McLanahan 1991; Bumpass and McLanahan 1989; Haveman, Wolfe, and Spaulding 1991; Hogan and Kitagawa 1985; Krein and Beller 1988; Li and Wojtkiewicz 1992; McLanahan 1985; McLanahan 1988; McLanahan and Bumpass 1988; Sandefur, McLanahan, and Wojtkiewicz 1992). Research has also shown that those who lived in stepparent families marry earlier, become parents earlier, and have less chance of graduating high school (Astone and McLanahan 1991; Li and Wojtkiewicz 1992; Michael and Tuma 1985; Sandefur, McLanahan, and Wojtkiewicz 1992).

If some groups experience mother-only or mother-stepfather families more than others, then some groups experience the associated negative outcomes more than others. Research has shown that blacks experience more family disruption than whites (Bumpass 1984; Bumpass and Rindfuss 1979; Hofferth 1985). The significance of this finding is that blacks experience the negative effects of nonintact families more than whites. The present study examines how Mexicans and Puerto Ricans fare in regard to experiences with nonintact families.

There are problems in considering Hispanic children as one group. Bean and Tienda (1987) point out that Mexicans and Puerto Ricans should be considered separately in sociological analyses. Not only are there cultural differences due to country of origin; these groups also differ in settlement patterns and immigration experiences. The result is population subgroups with distinct cultural, economic, and demographic characteristics.

Statistics on nonmarital childbearing and divorce give us some idea of how the parental-structure experiences of Mexican and Puerto Rican children will compare to those of non-Hispanic white and black children. In 1985, while 15 percent of births were to unmarried women among non-Hispanic whites and 60 percent were to unmarried women among blacks, that proportion was 26 percent among Mexicans and 51 percent among Puerto Ricans (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1991b, 66). In 1980, among women who were first married ten to fourteen years earlier, 37 percent of non-Hispanic white females and 53 percent of black females were no longer in intact first marriages (Sweet and Bumpass 1987, 188). The proportions were 30 percent among Mexicans and 45 percent among Puerto Ricans.

Based on these statistics, it appears that the parental-structure experiences of Mexican and Puerto Rican children will lie somewhere between those of non-Hispanic white and black children. The experiences of Mexican children should be more like those of non-Hispanic white children, while the experiences of Puerto Rican children should be more like those of black children.

DATA

Respondents to the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLSY) were first interviewed in 1979 and have been reinterviewed yearly thereafter. The primary purpose of the NLSY was to collect data on the labor force experiences of youth as they moved into adulthood and to collect data

on factors potentially impacting labor market attachment. However, the NLSY serves as a more general social survey because of the variety of information it contains.

The retention rate after the 1988 wave of the survey was 90 percent. The analysis in this paper uses the cross-sectional subsample and the black and Hispanic supplemental samples. I excluded those respondents with missing data on the parental-structure variables (253 among all cases). The respondents in the sample used in the analysis were born between 1957 and 1964. The analysis uses sample weights.

The 1988 wave of the NLSY included questions on the parental history of each respondent. The survey asked respondents if they lived with their biological mother, biological father, stepmother, stepfather, adoptive mother, or adoptive father in any of the years from birth to age nineteen. If the respondent was not living with one of those parents, the survey asked respondents if they lived with grandparents, other relatives, foster parents, friends, in a children's home, in a detention center, in other institution, with other persons, or on their own.

The parental-history data were used to create the following typology:

mother-father
mother only
mother-stepfather
father only
father-stepmother
grandparents
other relatives
adoptive parents
foster parents
institution
on own
other

The "institution" category includes those living in a children's home, group care home, detention center, or other institution. The "on own" category also includes those who were living with friends or with other persons. Some respondents reported living in two or more types of living situations in one year, probably because they moved from one type to another. Some other

respondents did not report any living situation. Both types of respondents were included in the "other" category.

Race/ethnicity was measured using the response to a question which asked what was the respondent's origin or descent. If a respondent listed more than one racial/ethnic origin, the one which they indicated that they felt closest to was used. Some respondents did not answer or gave none, other, or American as an answer. The sample identification question was then used to classify these respondents. Those who were coded white in the sample identification question were coded as non-Hispanic white in the analysis. Those who were coded black in the sample identification question were coded as black. Those coded as Hispanic in the sample identification question were coded as other Hispanic. Those coded as other Hispanics were not examined in this analysis due to their small sample size.

RESULTS

Parental Structure by Age

Table 1 shows the parental-structure distributions at birth and at ages 3, 6, 9, 12, 15, and 18. The distributions are like those that can be obtained from cross-sectional data but are different in an important way: they are for the same birth cohort at each age. Age distributions from the U.S. Census, for example, would apply to different cohorts.

The general pattern is that children start out in either mother-only or mother-father families at birth. As the cohort ages, the percentage in mother-only and mother-stepfather families increases while the percentage in mother-father families decreases. The percentages living with father only or father-stepmother are not large at any age. For blacks, a noticeable percentage of children live only with grandparents, particularly in the later years. For the other racial/ethnic groups, living only with grandparents or other relatives is not as common.

TABLE 1

Percentage Distribution of Parental-Structure Types, by Race/Ethnicity and Age

Age	Parental-Structure Type													
	MF	M	MSF	F	FSM	GRA	REL	ADT	FOS	INS	OWN	OTH	Total	N
White														
0	95.1	2.1	0.3	0.2	0.0	0.1	0.0	1.6	0.1	0.0	0.0	0.5	100.0	4,102
3	92.8	3.1	1.1	0.4	0.2	0.2	0.0	1.8	0.1	0.0	0.0	0.3	100.0	
6	89.4	4.2	2.5	0.7	0.6	0.3	0.0	1.9	0.2	0.0	0.0	0.3	100.0	
9	86.5	5.0	3.9	0.5	1.0	0.4	0.1	1.9	0.1	0.1	0.0	0.5	100.0	
12	83.2	6.0	5.4	0.6	1.4	0.4	0.1	1.9	0.2	0.1	0.1	0.6	100.0	
15	79.5	7.8	5.9	1.0	1.6	0.6	0.2	1.8	0.2	0.1	0.3	1.0	100.0	
18	73.1	8.1	4.8	1.7	1.4	0.7	0.5	1.6	0.3	0.2	4.6	3.0	100.0	
Black														
0	78.4	16.5	0.9	0.7	0.2	1.2	0.3	0.5	0.0	0.0	0.1	1.2	100.0	2,524
3	75.1	17.0	2.2	0.9	0.2	2.1	0.5	0.6	0.1	0.0	0.1	1.2	100.0	
6	68.4	19.9	4.2	1.1	0.4	2.9	0.8	0.6	0.1	0.0	0.1	1.5	100.0	
9	62.7	23.2	5.9	0.9	0.7	3.2	0.9	0.5	0.2	0.0	0.1	1.7	100.0	
12	58.6	25.1	7.1	1.4	0.7	3.2	1.1	0.5	0.2	0.1	0.1	1.9	100.0	
15	53.8	27.6	7.7	1.8	1.0	3.3	1.2	0.4	0.4	0.1	0.6	2.1	100.0	
18	50.5	26.4	5.9	2.0	0.8	3.3	2.0	0.3	0.3	0.3	4.1	4.1	100.0	

(table continues)

TABLE 1, continued

Age	Parental-Structure Type												Total	N
	MF	M	MSF	F	FSM	GRA	REL	ADT	FOS	INS	OWN	OTH		
Mexican														
0	92.8	4.9	0.6	0.1	0.0	0.3	0.2	0.2	0.0	0.1	0.0	0.8	100.0	990
3	88.7	6.6	2.2	0.3	0.0	0.9	0.2	0.4	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.7	100.0	
6	84.2	8.5	3.9	0.2	0.2	1.1	0.5	0.5	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.9	100.0	
9	80.0	10.3	5.6	0.6	0.4	1.3	0.5	0.5	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.8	100.0	
12	76.5	11.8	7.2	0.8	0.5	1.1	0.6	0.6	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.9	100.0	
15	72.7	13.6	7.5	0.7	1.0	1.1	1.0	0.5	0.2	0.2	0.4	1.1	100.0	
18	67.7	13.1	5.4	1.2	1.0	1.0	2.2	0.4	0.1	0.2	5.5	2.2	100.0	
Puerto Rican														
0	85.2	11.7	0.9	0.0	0.0	0.9	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	1.3	100.0	236
3	82.0	10.7	3.8	0.0	0.0	2.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	1.1	0.0	0.4	100.0	
6	74.5	13.5	6.8	0.9	0.0	2.0	0.0	0.8	0.0	1.1	0.0	0.4	100.0	
9	68.7	17.7	8.2	0.9	0.0	1.7	0.3	0.8	0.0	1.1	0.0	0.6	100.0	
12	61.0	21.5	10.3	0.9	1.5	1.7	0.5	0.5	0.4	1.1	0.0	0.6	100.0	
15	57.9	23.7	10.3	1.2	1.5	1.7	0.0	0.5	1.4	0.5	0.7	0.6	100.0	
18	51.6	24.1	5.7	3.8	0.8	0.7	1.6	0.5	0.0	0.5	7.1	3.6	100.0	

Source: National Longitudinal Survey of Youth, 1988 wave.
Key: MF: mother-father; M: mother only; MSF: mother-stepfather; F: father only; FSM: father-stepmother; GRA: grandparents; REL: other relatives; ADT: adoptive parents; FOS: foster parents; INS: institution; OWN: on own; OTH: other.

The percentages living with mother only at birth are lower for non-Hispanic whites (2 percent) and Mexicans (5 percent) than for blacks (17 percent) and Puerto Ricans (12 percent). This is a pattern which appears throughout the analysis: non-Hispanic whites and blacks are at the extremes, with Mexicans and Puerto Ricans in between. Remember that the respondents in the analysis were born between 1957 and 1964. The proportion of nonmarital births was much lower then than it is currently.

Table 1 also includes the percentages living in various nonfamily situations; these are quite small at each age for each racial/ethnic group except for living on one's own. For each group, the percentage living on their own increases noticeably between age fifteen and age eighteen. At age eighteen between 4 and 7 percent are living on their own.

In the remainder of the analysis, the ages considered are limited to between birth and age fifteen. I do this so that patterns in living with parents are not distorted by patterns in leaving home. I also include the foster parents, institution, and on own living arrangements in the "other" category.

Ever Experienced Parental Structure

Table 2 shows the percentage who ever lived in each of the parental-structure types between birth and age fifteen. These percentages are higher than the percentages who lived in the various types at age fifteen because some children lived in some other type at a younger age.

The parental-structure types most frequently experienced are mother-father, mother only, and mother-stepfather. Blacks and Puerto Ricans experienced mother-only families most often, while non-Hispanic whites experienced them least often. The percentage for Mexicans was intermediate. Non-Hispanic whites experienced mother-stepfather families least often; Puerto Ricans experienced them most often. The percentages for blacks and Mexicans fell in between.

TABLE 2

Percentage Who Ever Experienced Parental-Structure Type, by Race/Ethnicity

Race/Ethnicity	Parental-Structure Type									N
	MF	M	MSF	F	FSM	GRA	REL	ADT	OTH	
White	95.5	13.5	7.1	2.5	2.1	0.8	0.3	2.1	2.4	4,102
Black	79.3	37.6	9.7	3.8	1.6	4.7	1.9	0.7	4.5	2,524
Mexican	93.6	21.5	9.4	1.9	1.0	1.7	1.8	0.6	2.8	990
Puerto Rican	85.9	34.4	12.3	1.6	1.5	2.3	0.8	0.8	6.0	236

Source: National Longitudinal Survey of Youth, 1988 wave.
Key: MF: mother-father; M: mother only; MSF: mother-stepfather; F: father only; FSM: father-stepmother; GRA: grandparents; REL: other relatives; ADT: adoptive parents; OTH: foster parents, institution, on own, other.

Other family living situations were not experienced very often with a few exceptions. A noticeable segment of blacks, 4 percent, lived with father only at some time. Living with grandparents was most common among blacks (5 percent).

While looking at which children ever lived in a certain parental-structure type provides an overview of experiences, it does not differentiate between experiences that originate with a nonmarital birth from those that originate from parental marital disruption. Tables 3 and 4 make this distinction.

Mean Years in Parental Structure

Blacks and Puerto Ricans have higher percentages who start out in mother-only families than the other two groups and, conversely, lower percentages who start out in mother-father families. Are their living-arrangement experiences after that point different as well? Table 3 addresses this issue by showing the mean number of years in a parental-structure type, given parental-structure type at birth. Note that the total number of years between birth and age fifteen is sixteen years.

For those living in mother-father families at birth, most of their years between birth and age fifteen are lived in mother-father families. There are not many differences between racial/ethnic groups. Blacks and Puerto Ricans spend at most a year more in mother-only families than do the other groups.

For those living in mother-only families at birth, most of the years between birth and age fifteen are spent in mother-only families. Blacks and Mexicans spend two to three more years in mother-only families than do the other groups. The additional time spent in mother-only families by blacks and Mexicans translates into less time spent in mother-stepfather families.

While there are some differences between racial/ethnic groups in years spent in parental-structure types, these differences are not as striking as the differences in the percentage in mother-only families at birth. Parental structure at birth is a key determinant of the amount of time that children will spend in various family situations.

TABLE 3

Mean Years in Parental-Structure Type, by Type at Birth and Race/Ethnicity

Race/Ethnicity	Parental-Structure Type									Total	N
	MF	M	MSF	F	FSM	GRA	REL	ADT	OTH		
Mother-Father at Birth											
White	14.7	0.6	0.4	0.1	0.1	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.1	16.0	3,882
Black	13.5	1.7	0.4	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.0	0.0	0.1	16.0	1,957
Mexican	14.2	1.0	0.5	0.1	0.0	0.1	0.0	0.0	0.1	16.0	918
Puerto Rican	13.4	1.6	0.6	0.1	0.1	0.0	0.0	0.1	0.1	16.0	200
Mother only at Birth											
White	0.6	9.1	4.1	0.3	0.2	0.8	0.0	0.5	0.4	16.0	105
Black	0.2	12.5	1.7	0.1	0.0	0.9	0.2	0.0	0.4	16.0	436
Mexican	0.8	11.1	2.6	0.0	0.0	0.3	0.5	0.1	0.6	16.0	49
Puerto Rican	0.2	9.5	3.8	0.4	0.2	0.4	0.0	0.0	1.5	16.0	29

Source: National Longitudinal Survey of Youth, 1988 wave.
Key: MF: mother-father; M: mother only; MSF: mother-stepfather; F: father only; FSM: father-stepmother; GRA: grandparents; REL: other relatives; ADT: adoptive parents; OTH: foster parents, institution, on own, other.

However, those who start out in mother-father families at birth are not homogenous. Some live in that situation throughout childhood and adolescence while some experience the disruption of their parents' marriage. Table 4 shows the percentage who experienced parental marital disruption, given that they lived in a mother-father family at birth. There are clear differences, with black and Puerto Rican children experiencing the most parental disruption, and non-Hispanic whites, the least, with Mexicans in between.

Given that there are racial/ethnic differences in the percentage experiencing a parental marital disruption, are there also strong differences in subsequent living-arrangement experiences? Table 4 shows that there is not much difference between racial/ethnic groups in the amount of time spent in mother-father families among those who experienced a parental marital disruption. There are larger differences in the amount of time spent in mother-only and mother-stepfather families. However, these differences are still two years or less. Thus, among those who start out in mother-father families, parental marital disruption is a key determinant of the amount of time that children will spend in various living arrangements.

Parental-Structure Transitions

Table 5 considers in more detail the proportions making transitions between birth and age fifteen (see the appendix for details about construction of the transition variables). There are two sets of transitions in the table. One set is for respondents who started out in mother-only families at birth, while the other is for those who started out with mother-father at birth and then experienced a disruption.

Moving from a mother-only family at birth into a mother-father family was least common among blacks and Puerto Ricans. Non-Hispanic whites and Mexicans were more likely to make such a move than the other groups, but the percentage doing so was still 12 or less. Unmarried mothers do not unite with the biological fathers very often.

TABLE 4

Percentage Who Ever Experienced Parental Marital Disruption and Mean Years in Parental-Structure Type for Those Who Ever Experienced Parental Marital Disruption, by Race/Ethnicity

Race/Ethnicity	Ever Dsrpt.	Parental-Structure Type									Total	N
		MF	M	MSF	F	FSM	GRA	REL	ADT	OTH		
White	16.9	8.6	3.3	2.3	0.5	0.7	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.3	16.0	695
Black	32.2	8.1	5.2	1.3	0.4	0.2	0.3	0.2	0.0	0.3	16.0	633
Mexican	22.4	7.8	4.5	2.3	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.2	0.0	0.3	16.0	194
Puerto Rican	33.2	8.2	4.8	1.9	0.2	0.2	0.0	0.0	0.3	0.4	16.0	68

Source: National Longitudinal Survey of Youth, 1988 wave.
Key: MF: mother-father; M: mother only; MSF: mother-stepfather; F: father only; FSM: father-stepmother; GRA: grandparents; REL: other relatives; ADT: adoptive parents; OTH: foster parents, institution, on own, other.

TABLE 5

Percentage Distribution of Type of Parental-Structure Transitions, by Race/Ethnicity and Parental-Structure Type at Birth

Type of Transition	White	Black	Mexican	Puerto Rican
		Mother only at Birth		
No Change	30.1	54.4	40.5	42.9
M->MF	8.7	3.4	12.0	0.0
M->MSF	42.3	21.3	33.0	36.7
M->GRA	7.2	9.6	3.8	4.6
M->REL	0.4	2.7	2.8	0.0
OTH	11.3	8.6	7.9	15.8
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
N	105	436	49	29
		Mother-Father at Birth and Later Disruption		
MF->M	46.3	64.1	56.3	63.9
MF->M M->MSF	21.7	12.7	20.2	10.6
MF->MSF	13.0	6.6	10.1	13.1
MF->F	10.8	8.8	6.1	2.8
MF->GRA	1.5	2.9	2.0	0.0
MF->REL	0.6	1.7	1.3	0.0
OTH	6.1	3.2	4.0	9.6
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
N	695	633	194	68

Source: National Longitudinal Survey of Youth, 1988 wave.
Key: MF: mother-father; M: mother only; MSF: mother-stepfather; F: father only; FSM: father-stepmother; GRA: grandparents; REL: other relatives; ADT: adoptive parents; OTH: foster parents, institution, on own, other.

Blacks were the most likely to start out in a mother-only family and then not experience another change. Mexicans and Puerto Ricans were intermediate and non-Hispanic whites were the least likely. Even for non-Hispanic whites, about 30 percent stayed in a mother-only family from birth to age fifteen. Thus, a significant proportion of children born into mother-only families stay in that family situation throughout childhood.

Non-Hispanic whites who start out in mother-only families are most likely to move into mother-stepfather families. Mexicans and Puerto Ricans are intermediate while blacks have the lowest chance. Since no change and a transition from mother only to mother-stepfather are the dominant transition types among those who start out in mother-only families at birth, the groups that are high on one transition tend to be low on the other.

Four transitions dominate among those who started out in mother-father families at birth and then experienced parental marital disruption. Large proportions experience a transition into a mother-only family and then no further change. The highest proportion is 64 percent for both blacks and Puerto Ricans. Mexicans are intermediate at 56 percent, and non-Hispanic whites are lowest at 46 percent.

There are two ways to get into a mother-stepfather family from a mother-father family. One is to move through a mother-only family on the way to the mother-stepfather family, and the other is to move from a mother-father family to a mother-stepfather family without spending a detectable amount of time in a mother-only family. These two transitions combined show that 35 percent of non-Hispanic whites and 30 percent of Mexicans who started out in mother-father families made such a move. Only 24 percent of Puerto Ricans and 19 percent of blacks moved into mother-stepfather families.

Moving from a mother-father family into a father-only family is least common among blacks (9 percent), Mexicans (6 percent), and Puerto Ricans (3 percent). Such a transition is most common among non-Hispanic whites (11 percent).

DISCUSSION

The research shows, as did previous research, that non-Hispanic whites have the least experience with nonintact families and blacks have the most experience. The contribution of the present research is the finding that the experiences of Mexicans and Puerto Ricans lie between these two extremes.

The analysis showed that it is important to distinguish between Mexicans and Puerto Ricans in examining the living arrangements of children. There is as much diversity between Mexican and Puerto Rican children in living arrangements as there is between these two groups and either non-Hispanic white or black children. While sample size is often a constraint, these results illustrate that it is important in analyses of living arrangements to consider Mexicans and Puerto Ricans separately whenever possible.

While this study has shown that there are differences between racial/ethnic groups in the parental-structure experiences of children, these groups share the same basic underlying pattern. The central element of this pattern is that children almost always live with their biological mother. While children often live with mother and father or with mother and stepfather, living with mother only occurs frequently nonetheless. Alternative situations are not common for any of the racial/ethnic groups. At each age between birth and fifteen, 90 percent of children in each of the racial/ethnic groups live in mother-father, mother-only, or mother-stepfather family types.

The study provides new information about the proportion experiencing certain types of living-arrangement transitions. It is rare for those who start out with mother only at birth to move into a

mother-father family. The results also show that mother-only families often are terminal destinations. Large proportions of those who start out in mother-only families at birth stay in that type through age fifteen. In addition, large proportions who start out in mother-father families move into mother-only families at some point and do not experience any further change.

Key transition points in parental-structure experiences occur at birth and upon parental marital disruption. On average, those who start out in mother-only families spend more than half the years between birth and age fifteen in mother-only families. Those who start out with mother-father spend, on average, less than two years in mother-only families. Those who start out with mother-father and experience parental marital disruption spend, on average, more than a third of the years between birth and age fifteen in mother-only or mother-stepfather families. Of course, those who start out with mother-father and do not experience parental marital disruption do not spend any time in those types.

Racial/ethnic groups differ sharply in the proportion who lived with mother only at birth and in the proportion who experienced parental marital disruption. In both cases, non-Hispanic whites and Mexicans were lowest while blacks and Puerto Ricans were highest. While there were some differences in parental-structure experiences between racial/ethnic groups once these transitions occurred, the larger difference was in the proportion who experienced the transitions.

Differences in the proportion starting out in mother-only families at birth and in the proportion who live through parental marital disruption leads to inequality between racial/ethnic groups in the parental-structure experiences of children. Non-Hispanic white children have the least exposure to family situations with negative implications for the later life course. Mexican and Puerto Rican children are intermediate with Mexicans closer to non-Hispanic whites while Puerto Rican children are closer to black children. Black children have the most experience with adverse family situations.

Appendix

The following are the definitions for the transitions used in Table 5.

Mother Only at Birth	
No Change	: no subsequent changes of any kind.
M->MF	: M->MF occurred.
M->MSF	: M->MSF occurred; M->MF did not occur.
M->GRA	: M->GRA occurred; M->MF or M->MSF did not occur.
M->REL	: M->REL occurred; M->MF, M->MSF, or M->GRA did not occur.
Other Change	: other change than M->MF, M->MSF, M->GRA, or M->REL occurred.

Mother-Father at Birth and Later Disruption	
MF->M	: MF->M occurred; M->MSF did not occur.
MF->M M->MSF	: MF->M and MF->MSF occurred;
MF->MSF	: MF->MSF occurred; MF->M did not occur.
MF->F	: MF->F occurred; MF->M or MF->MSF did not occur.
MF->GRA	: MF->GRA occurred; MF->M, MF->MSF, or MF->F did not occur.
MF->REL	: MF->REL occurred; MF->M, MF->MSF, MF->F, or MF->GRA did not occur.
Other Change	: other change than MF->M, MF->MSF, MF->F, MF->GRA, or MF->REL occurred.

MF: mother-father; M: mother only; MSF: mother-stepfather; F: father only;
FSM: father-stepmother; GRA: grandparents; REL: other relatives.

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